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ABSTRACT

The role of the cooperating teacher is one of the most crucial factors in determining the success or failure of the student teaching experience. There are seven major factors to be considered in the development of an effective cooperating teacher-student professional relationship. First, the student teacher must be given a sincere sense of belonging. Setting the tone of the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship is also extremely important and should be accomplished during the first few days of the student teaching experience. The third factor involves allowing for individual abilities to control the rate at which the student will progress into full time teaching. It is also necessary for the cooperating teacher and the student teacher to schedule a portion of each day for a conference and planning period. The fifth factor concerns allowing the student teacher to have experience in writing lesson plans for the activities he/she teaches. Next, informal observations and feedback aimed at the improvement of the individual or program must be provided by the cooperating teacher on regular basis. Finally, each cooperating teacher should be expected to formally observe the student teacher a minimum number of time while he/she is teaching the entire class. By establishing strong lines of communication at the start of the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship, the opportunity for a positive student teaching experience is greatly increased. (RC)

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THE COOPERATING TEACHER - SOME HINTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

by

G. Thomas Baer

The role of the cooperating teacher is one of the most crucial factors in determining the success or failure of the student teaching experience. Since it is the cooperating teacher who works most closely with the student teacher, it is he who has the greatest opportunity in assisting the student teacher with the process of developing into an effective teacher. However, if the cooperating teacher is to have maximum impact on the development of student teachers, his role must be accurately defined and

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made quite clear - it cannot be left to develop haphazardly or by chance. Thus, it is necessary to set forth guidelines directing the role and activities of the cooperating teacher. This is not to say that all cooperating teachers should mirror one another and produce teacher candidates from the same mold. On the contrary, the student teacher program should be based on the philosophy that each student teacher comes to the experience with a different background, strengths, weaknesses, needs, interests, and abilities. For this reason the program must attempt to meet the individual needs of each student teacher. Yet, an effective framework from which these individual programs are allowed to unfold has been developed through past experiences. The following is a description of those factors which are most crucial in the development of an effective cooperating teacher-student teacher professional relationship:

I. SENSE OF BELONGING. The first item which must be accomplished is to provide the student teacher with a sincere sense of belonging. Welcome him and accept him as a professional colleague. Introduce the student teacher to your pupils making sure they understand that his role will be one of authority and that he will function as any teacher would. Other items which will assist in giving the student teacher this sense of belonging include:

A. Provide the student teacher with a table, desk,

or work area which he can consider his own.

B. Provide the student teacher with a plan book (if available) or share your plan book with him when he assumes full control of the class.

C. Provide the student teacher with instructions on how to complete the attendance forms properly.

D. Indicate to the student teacher where the cumulative records are maintained and introduce him to the pertinent information contained within these records.

E. Introduce the student teacher to the progress reporting form (conference and written) and explain the District's philosophy of grading. Also, be sure to make it clear as to what grading responsibilities you will expect the student teacher to assume.

F. Provide the student teacher with access to all booklets of information (District Philosophy Handbook, Building Handbook, Policy Handbook, etc.) that have been developed by the district.

II. GETTING STARTED. Setting the tone of the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship is extremely important and should be accomplished during the first few days of the student teaching experience. At this time the cooperating teacher should set forth his particular expectations of the student teacher. Together, the cooperating teacher and student teacher should set up definite dates and times for

conferencing, turning in lesson plans, and scheduling evaluation sessions. By being definite and providing expectations from the start, the cooperating teacher should be decreasing the chances of problems arising due to misunderstandings.

III. PROGRESSION INTO FULL TIME TEACHING. The rate at which the student teacher will be able to assume full control of the class will vary according to individual abilities. However, as a general rule, it is best to have the student teacher assume the responsibilities of the classroom teacher on a gradual basis. This allows him to gain confidence in one subject area before taking on additional teaching responsibilities. Eventually the student teacher should be able to assume the total responsibilities of a teacher. He should also be expected to participate in faculty meetings, team meetings, assist with recess duty, attend PTA meetings, and perform other activities which are considered to be part of the teacher's normal area of responsibility.

IV. DAILY CONFERENCE AND PLANNING PERIOD. The cooperating teacher and student teacher should schedule a portion of each day to complete the following:

A. Develop and/or evaluate daily lesson plans. Provide the student teacher with constructive feedback as to the appropriateness or effectiveness of his planning.

B. Discuss with the student teacher his short and long range student teaching goals. Work toward motivating the student teacher to participate in self-evaluation.

C. Provide the student teacher with constructive feedback regarding his performance as a teacher. Praise and positively reinforce those qualities which you feel are desirable and offer suggestions when areas of weakness appear.

D. Encourage the student teacher to express his opinions and ideas, and attempt to build a relationship which will allow the student teacher to freely discuss items of a personal as well as a professional nature.

V. LESSON PLANNING. The student teacher should have experience in writing lesson plans for the activities he teaches. These plans should be given to the cooperating teacher in time for him to review them and make written or oral comments, and with time available for the student teacher to make necessary revisions after this review. The student teacher who demonstrates the ability to present well-planned and organized lessons in writing, should have adjustments made in the type of written plan he is asked to turn in as the student teaching progresses and the situation demands.

VI. INFORMAL OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK. The major thrust of evaluation must be aimed at the improvement of the individual or program being evaluated. In order to

accomplish this vital task it is essential to provide constant feedback for those who are being judged. Therefore, the cooperating teacher must provide the student teacher with constructive criticism and possible avenues for improvement on a regular basis.

VII. FORMAL OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK. Each cooperating teacher should be expected to formally observe the student teacher a minimum number of times (will vary according to university requirements) while he is teaching the entire class. An observation sheet will be provided on which you should record your evaluative observations. (If an observation sheet is not provided it is important for the cooperating teacher and student teacher to cooperatively develop the instrument that will be used for recording observations.) This recorded information should be shared with the student teacher as soon after the lesson as possible. Formal observations should be equally spaced throughout the student teaching experience.

The above framework has been presented to hopefully assist teachers with the development of an effective cooperating teacher-student teacher professional relationship. Most of the suggestions which have been offered pertain to the establishment and maintenance of open lines of communications because experiences have shown that this is the area in which most difficulties occur. By establishing strong

lines of communications at the very start of the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship, the opportunity for a positive student teaching experience is greatly increased.